

Embracing the Light

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

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The Cleveland Cavaliers have won three of their last six games. They have traded away remnants of the Whore of Akron era (Mo Williams, Jamarion Moon). They have picked up an all-star guard (Baron Davis) and two young, big bodies (6-foot-11 Semih Erden and 6-foot-7 Luke Harangody) via trades.

The Cavs have now won 11. Hot on their tail for worst record in the NBA are Minnesota (14 wins), Sacramento (14 wins) and Washington (15 wins).

So, all of a sudden, I hear the not-so-distant wail of fans lamenting the fact that the Cavs cannot win so many games before the regular season ends, thus to forfeit their chance at the top pick in the collegiate draft lottery.

Bunk. Pure bunk, I say.

Since when is winning so unimportant to the Cavs -- or any professional franchise or any competitive team at any level, for that matter? Isn't the point of following a team seeing it win? Hasn't it always been that way? Are we more likely to fondly remember the Daugherty-Price-Nance days or the Murray-Gatling-Mihm days?

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A Winning Culture

Byron Scott has been to the top before. He knows that a winning culture is an absolute prerequisite for a team to be competitive in the NBA. He realizes that the culture is even more important for a young team whose players have yet to be molded into winners.

How to develop a winning culture? [Forrest McKinnis](#) has the answers:

“Evaluate athletes based on personality traits that are conducive to a positive environment, then work to marry them with the right skill set,” he says. “A winning basketball culture is not a trait born into, but rather a trait that is taught.”

With a predominantly young roster and good veteran role models like Antawn Jamison and Anthony Parker in place, the Cavs are poised to develop that culture. (If perennial malcontent Baron Davis doesn't buy into the winning culture strategy, rest assured he will be gone faster than you can say Ricky Davis.)

About the Draft...

For the first time in recent memory, there is no surefire No. 1 pick in this year's college draft. Most pundits and fans have identified Duke point guard Kyrie Irving as the player who could most help the Cavs.

But given recent history, most teams will opt for a big man (like Baylor's Perry Jones, Turkey's Enes Kanter or Kentucky's Terrence Jones) if one is available; they tend to wait longer to pick guards, blindly following the old basketball saw that "you can't teach height." So Irving may last until the second, third, fourth or even fifth pick -- making it less important that the Cavs set their sights on the league's worst record (which still doesn't guarantee the first draft choice).

Most NBA experts are likewise calling this year's overall college draft class weak. The Los

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Angeles Clippers, for instance, have such little confidence in next year's rookie crop that they were willing to give up a potential lottery pick for Williams and Moon. (Not that Clipper executives are necessarily correct in their assessment, but they do fall into line with most other NBA executives in this regard.)

If, indeed, it's a weak draft, there probably isn't a whole lot of talent differential between the first draft choice and, say, the eighth choice. Which is to say that it's probably more important to develop a winning culture than worry about where the Cavs draft.

As general manager Chris Grant pointed out 30,000 times this past week, "There are 10 to 15 good players in any draft." The Cavs are bound to have two of the top 15 choices, so they will get help -- wherever they are drafting.

Stow the Pessimism

There has been a tendency, since tWoA left, to believe that the Cavs are the dregs of the NBA and that they will never be good again.

Many regular contributors to TCF's boards -- whose pessimism is rivaled only by the Gloomy Guses on Cleveland.com -- will rake over the coals anyone who expresses the least amount of desire to see the current Cavs win a few games this season.

Yes, admittedly, there is some validity to this line of thought, given the systemic problems in the league's front-office philosophy. To wit: (1) really bad teams move to the top of the draft board, forcing mediocre teams to be mediocre forever; (2) star players dictate their teams; and (3) power is allocated to teams on both coasts with a dearth of talent left for "flyover" country like Cleveland. But, quite frankly, these are problems that are out of the hands of anybody in northern Ohio; and some of them may be solved when the league renegotiates its contract with the NBA Players Association during the off-season. (We can only hope.)

Show the Optimism

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Until those problems can be resolved, thank goodness for fans who still attend the games in person: those stalwart never-say-die souls who yell their lungs out at a J.J. Hickson “get that stuff outta here” block or a soaring Christian Eyenga slam-dunk. (As opposed to the scumbags who type simple-minded running comments onto the end of Mary Schmitt Boyer’s game updates, noting that “JJ is not the answer” or that “Einga still sucks.”)

The Cavs may be one of the worst teams in the league. But they are busting their balls to win -- which is more than you can say for last year’s “savior” (snicker, snicker) who has since departed. No, some of the Cavs can’t hit an open 15-footer to save their souls, but they are as athletic as any recent Cavs team; they are entertaining; and, very recently, they’ve played some exciting ball -- witness their late charge last night against Philadelphia. As Coach Scott has said since the start of the year, they are all about improving, game by game, and it’s finally starting to show.

One more reason to be at least a little bit optimistic: Until now, it hasn’t been apparent that Grant and owner Dan Gilbert have had a long-term plan in place. But with the recent trades, it appears that, thankfully, they really do!

There is a light at the end of the tunnel, people. The wins are now starting to come. Embrace the light.